

Care Sheet:

Robust and McGregor's skinks



Robust skink (*Oligosoma alani*)

Adult Size: up to 150mm SVL.

Threat status: 'At Risk – Recovering'.

Lifespan: over 32 years. (likely over 40).

Habitat: coastal forest, flaxland, deep rock piles, iceplant herbfield, seabird burrows, deep leaf litter and under rocks / logs.

Permit Level: Conservation species.

McGregor's skink (*Oligosoma macgregori*)

Adult Size: up to 114mm SVL.

Threat status: 'At Risk – Recovering'.

Lifespan: over 35 years.

Habitat: coastal forest, flaxland, boulder beaches, deep rock piles, iceplant herbfield, seabird burrows, deep leaf litter and under rocks / logs.

Permit Level: Insurance population species.

Enclosure:

Minimum recommended enclosure size = 150x70x70cm (LxWxH).

Ideal Group Size:

1:1 (M:F).

Compatible Species:

Duvaucel's geckos (but authorisations usually prohibit housing with other species).

Recommended Cage Furnishing:

The enclosure should be decorated with live plants (though these are not entirely necessary), logs, low branches for climbing, and a thick layer of leaf litter for these skinks to forage and take refuge in. Robust and McGregor's skinks are particularly susceptible to evaporative water loss through their skin, so it is crucial that they be provided adequate damp refuge sites in the form of buried containers filled with damp leaf litter and/or damp sphagnum moss. The provision of dry refuges is also equally important as despite these lizards' requirement for damp habitats, they will usually take refuge in cool dry refuges. Issues with skin infections can be experienced if these species are kept in conditions that are too damp where they aren't provided adequate dry refuge sites. Refuge sites that have proved popular in captivity include rock piles, sections of bamboo or polythene pipe (with one end blocked up) buried in leaf litter, rock piles, bark stacks, hollow ponga logs, and stacks of Onduline semi-buried in leaf litter. It is important that the refuge sites remain thermally stable as both of these species are susceptible to heat stress. If Onduline is used it is advisable to cover the top in leaf litter or a piece of wood to insulate it from the sun to prevent any lizards using the sites from overheating.

Breeding:

Both these species take around five years (up to 8 years in *alani*) to reach maturity, and females may only breed biennially (once every two years). Both species can be highly aggressive (especially *O. macgregori*) so when pairing make sure to match animals based on size, and keep a close eye on newly introduced pairs. Some breeders remove gravid females and place them into a smaller cage for birthing as neonates can be difficult to locate / detect in large adult cages, and there is a risk the young may be eaten by the adults. Females usually give birth to around 5 offspring (up to 8 in large specimens of *O. alani*).

Diet:

The diet of these species includes a large portion of invertebrates such as crickets, beetles, moths, and spiders. Both species have been recorded eating smaller species of lizards in the wild and *O. alani* has been recorded feeding on seabird chicks. In captivity their diet may be supplemented with such items as egg, fish or mince, though these should only be used sparingly as overfeeding with these food items can cause obesity and other more serious health issues. Both species have been recorded eating the berries of native plants such as Kawakawa and *Coprosma* species, for *O. alani* these comprise around 30% of their diet in the warmer months. In captivity they should be provided with native fruits such as Coprosma or Kawakawa, or a mix of watered-down fruit puree with the addition of calcium and reptile vitamins, commercial fruit puree is high in calories so skinks should not be overfed on this, in order to avoid obesity.

Notes:

- Captive *O. macgregori* mainly originate from Mana Island near Wellington. Individuals from different geographic populations should not be housed together, in order to maintain their conservation value.
- Captive *O. alani* were collected from several islands, although anecdotally the remaining captive animals have all originated from Moturoa Island. Individuals from different geographic populations should not be housed together, in order to maintain their conservation value.



Example cage design for robust or McGregor's skinks. Having the cage open from the top will minimise the chances of these skinks escaping while the cage is being serviced.



Example set-up for Robust skink utilising several pot plants, a deep substrate of leaf litter and Onduline stacks covering damp and dry refuge sites.